

Waves Of Sentiment Seek End Of Strike

KELLOGG, Idaho (AP) — In a town traditionally closed-mouthed to strangers about labor strife, a visitor now is almost staggered by public waves of sentiment for quick settlement of the 5½-month strike that is crippling the community.

Where folks once refused to talk for fear of misunderstanding or possible reprisal, information and opinion are now volunteered. Nearly everyone appears to have taken sides in the strike of the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers (IUMMSW) against the Bunker Hill Co. and American Smelting and Refining Co.

A visitor can scarcely escape strike talk:

"Blue card is booming," said a

shopkeeper referring to the move to decertify the Mine-Mill Union at Bunker Hill and AS&R. "They'll soon have them out of there."

"For the first time the tide is really running against Mine-Mill," said a retired miner. "They know it, the company knows it and the town knows it."

"The businessmen uptown are really learning a lesson," said a striker at Mine-Mill headquarters for Local 18. "They're finally discovering that our paychecks keep this town going."

"Mine-Mill is running scared," said a miner represented by a rival union. "They show that by finally reaching agreement on a few minor points after a year and a half of talk."

"Everyone knows that if they don't settle soon there won't be anything to settle," said a housewife.

"The others don't care if we win or not," said a striker from his picket shack. "They just want us to start signing over our paychecks again."

"Everyone's taking pot shots at Mine-Mill now," said a striker outside the union relief store. "They forget all the gains it's won over the years."

"There won't be a Communist left in town by Christmas," said a high school student.

"Communists in the Mine-Mill nuts," said another striker.

"That's the charge they keep digging up when they can't think of anything else."

"We've won longer strikes than this," said a union officer.

Sharing the spotlight with the long strike is the so-called blue card movement to oust Mine-Mill as bargaining agent at Bunker Hill and AS&R.

Spokesmen for the dissident workers, who have formed a Northwest Metal Workers Union, haven't announced the number of signatures obtained for a proposed National Labor Relations Board bargaining election.

"Blue cards are coming in increased numbers," said one. "We

are extremely pleased."

The No. 1 rumor about town is that enough signatures have been obtained to petition the NLRB for an election at Bunker Hill but that sponsors are holding back until about half the workers are signed and the Mine-Mill has exhausted hope at the bargaining table.

The Mine-Mill contends this will never happen.

An estimated 2,000 workers were directly idled by the strike against Bunker Hill and some 500 by the walkout at AS&R. Not all were Mine-Mill members.

More than 1,000 residents are believed to have left the district since the strike began, 750 from Kellogg alone.

The union argues that those who stayed generally form the hard core of Mine-Mill membership and will remain faithful to the end.

The opposition contends that its stack of blue cards indicates that the majority of local members are dissatisfied with Mine-Mill leadership and handling of the strike.

They note that workers at Day Mines, Inc., recently decertified Mine-Mill as their bargaining agent and then quickly signed a contract with the company as independents.

Mine-Mill charges that the Northwest Metal Workers Union is management backed and would become a company union.

The dissident members deny this, saying they are strong union men, dissatisfied with Mine-Mill leadership, who wouldn't consider going back to work without a satisfactory contract. They acknowledge receiving financial support from many sources, including businessmen, but contend they owe favors to none.

There are even conflicting reports on how the negotiations are going.

At a mass meeting of strikers and their families last Saturday night, International Representative James Daugherty said that "95 per cent of our problems were cleared up" during a mediation meeting with Bunker Hill in Spokane the evening before. Members didn't vote on the items of contract language on which tentative agreement had been reached, but Daugherty said he expected to have a "total, complete package" ready to submit for a secret ballot soon.

The Bunker Hill spokesman was much more pessimistic. Robert E. Brown said: "In the eyes of company negotiators, the progress finally made is not of sufficient significance to encourage the belief that an early settlement is in sight. A number of controversial issues remain to be settled, among which is the very important question of wages."

About 500, including strikers and their wives with a scattering of children, attended the Saturday night meeting which was held in an unheated theater which seats 700. There was some applause, but the audience wasn't very demonstrative as Daugherty gave his report on negotiations and a number of speakers supported the strike.

The Mine-Mill Union was ejected

from the CIO a decade ago for alleged Communist domination.

Before his report, Daugherty told the children in the audience they should beware "of the propaganda, distortions and outright lies about the union that are implanted in young minds by those who teach you" and then added that Mine-Mill "is not Communist dominated."

Another speaker at the meeting was Chase Powers of Spokane, international board member and one of the Mine-Mill leaders free on appeal bond from a conspiracy conviction for signing a false non-Communist affidavit. Powers helped Mine-Mill organize the district 19 years ago. Mine-Mill officers said the meeting showed the continued, even growing, support of the strike. Dissenters contend that the size of the audience indicated just the opposite.

It may not be long until the true answer is revealed.

The same sentiment came from those on both sides of the battle lines:

"One way or another, something's going to give—and soon."

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